

## How can you provide healthy alternatives?

The best way to provide food sources for our local wildlife is to create a wildlife-friendly garden and provide appropriate shelter and clean water.

Take the time to learn about the natural diet of your local wildlife and provide appropriate natural food sources. Below are a few ideas:

- Plant a variety of native plants and shrubs including fruiting and nectar-producing varieties.
- Plant species that fruit or flower at various times of the year to provide a year-round source of food for a variety of species.
- Plant native grasses for seed eating birds such as parrots and finches.
- Create mulched areas and leave leaf litter, sticks and fallen logs in your garden to attract insects and lizards for carnivorous and insectivorous birds.
- Provide fresh water sources (such as bird baths) in open areas with nearby plants of varying heights so wildlife can see any approaching predators but yet still have a safe refuge to flee to. Ensure water sources are out of reach of predator species (such as cats and dogs) and they are kept clean and disinfected regularly to prevent the spread of diseases.
- Build and/or install nest boxes for a variety of species including possums, gliders, birds and insectivorous bats.
- Become a wildlife advocate and share this information with family and friends!

### Still not convinced?

Wildcare does not encourage the artificial feeding of wildlife although we do acknowledge the intrinsic value of this activity and the pleasure people gain from close encounters with wildlife in their own backyard.

If you cannot be convinced to stop feeding wildlife altogether, we encourage you to reduce any potential negative impacts by adopting the following guidelines:

- Ensure all feeding stations are thoroughly cleaned and disinfected regularly.
- Do not place food on the ground as this can increase the risk of predation and the spread of disease.
- Remove all uneaten food quickly—do not allow it to spoil. This is imperative in the hotter months.
- Never provide the foods listed previously—choose less harmful options.
- Do not feed on a regular basis—feed a small amount on an irregular basis to prevent wildlife from becoming dependent. Bear in mind that others in your area may also be feeding the wildlife.
- Ensure food sources are kept well away from domestic pets. They are best positioned in open areas, which allow wildlife an opportunity to flee quickly if danger arrives.
- Always use good quality food—do not feed spoiled food or left-overs, as this will cause illness.
- Do not feed sugar/honey and water mixes—use commercially available nectar mix which provides more nutrients (available at good pet stores).
- If feeding is attracting large numbers of animals at the same time, discontinue, to prevent them becoming a nuisance to neighbours, causing damage to property, or spreading disease.

**wildcare**  
caring for  
our wildlife

Our emergency hotline is available 24 hours,  
7 days a week including ALL public holidays.

**24 Hour Emergency Hotline**

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### *The issue of feeding wildlife is a complex and much debated topic.*

People like to feed wildlife because it allows them to experience wildlife up close and personal, however we should consider the long-term effects that feeding may have on local wildlife populations.

Increased dependency on people takes away that 'wildness' that makes them so unique. So let's help keep our WILDLife WILD!

## What is the problem?

There are many reasons why feeding wildlife may be harmful.

### *Change in natural behaviour*

Young wildlife may follow their parent's unnatural foraging behaviour and quickly become dependent on artificial feeding, thereby never learning the essential foraging or hunting skills that they will require to survive.

Native animals that are fed regularly can lose their natural fear of people and/or domestic animals. They may even become aggressive and pose a threat or nuisance to people.

Feeding large numbers of wildlife may directly impact upon your neighbours who may not appreciate your backyard visitors.



### *Risk of injury*

Wildlife may be more prone to being attacked by domestic dogs and cats when they visit feeding stations that are inappropriately positioned.

Although you may not have any domestic animals that might harm local wildlife, neighbouring properties may and wildlife will often need to traverse your neighbours' backyards to reach your home. Your neighbours may not be responsible pet owners. They may allow their pets to roam the neighbourhood and wander into your yard. Both of these scenarios leave wildlife open to predation.

### *Risk of Disease*

Diseases such as Psittacosis and Psittacine Beak and Feather Disease are harmful to our native birds and are spread through contact with droppings, saliva and feather dander.

The Psittacine Beak and Feather Disease is a very common virus found in many local parrot species. The virus leads to malformed feathers, which for some species results in the bird's inability to fly (thereby making it more prone to predation). It can also lead to a malformed beak, which will result in starvation due to the inability to feed. As the virus also attacks the immune system, many individuals will die from secondary infections such as pneumonia.

Infected animals can pass on diseases to healthy individuals at feeding stations.

### *Unbalanced animal populations*

Artificial feeding may result in increased breeding of some species, which may create an imbalance. This could result in some species, such as crows and ibis, being considered pests.

When competing for food, more aggressive species such as kookaburras and magpies may displace less-aggressive species.

### *Poor nutrition*

Many of the foods provided by humans lack the vital nutrients that the animal's natural food sources provide.

Many wildlife species feed on 'whole' animals such as insects and small mammals. They digest the fur and bones of their prey, which provides important nutritional requirements (such as calcium for strong bone development) and aids in digestion.

Parent birds dependent upon artificial foods will be providing poor nutrition to their young, which may affect the healthy development of their feathers and bones.

Many of the foods commonly fed to native wildlife can be harmful.

Some of the most common foods provided and their impact are outlined below:

- **Bread** can ferment in the crop or stomach and can cause a build-up of acid leading to digestive problems. When fed to kangaroos and wallabies, bread can cause conditions, such as 'lumpy jaw', which leads to eventual starvation.
- **Seed bells** frequently contain poor quality seeds often bound with wood glue and may contain chemicals.
- **Grain/seed** can cause gum problems and may lead to lumpy jaw in kangaroos and wallabies.
- **Sugar/honey and water mixes** do not provide the correct types of sugar that birds obtain from nectar.
- **Meat (such as steak mince)** is very high in protein, can contain high levels of phosphorous and be low in calcium, which leads to malnutrition.
- **Commercially available fruit** is not easily digested by some wildlife and holds little nutritional value.
- **Milk** suitable for people is very different from milk produced by native mammals and can be very detrimental to their health, causing diarrhoea, dehydration and even death.
- **Uneaten food** can also have environmental impacts. For example excess bread can settle on the bottom of ponds and rot which causes a rise in levels of bacteria in the water and promotes diseases such as botulism, which can kill water birds.

